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After this ceremony the girl is said to be *aka-ndu-kolot*. For some time afterwards she must not have her head shaved, and she must not use red paint or white clay.

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I was not able to learn much about the native ideas in connection with the menstrual function. According to the account given me by one informant I gathered that the girl's first menstrual discharge is supposed to be due to sexual intercourse. The man's breath goes into her nose and this produces the discharge. It is believed that if a man were to touch a girl during this period, either during the ceremony or for some time after it, his arm would swell up.

At every recurrence of the menstrual period a woman is required to abstain from eating certain foods. According to an *Akar-Bale* informant these are, in that tribe, pork, turtle, *Paradoxurus*, honey and yams. An *Aka-Cari* informant added to the above list dugong, monitor lizard, and the fish *komar*. If she ate any of these things at such a time she would be ill. This continues throughout her life till the climacteric. A menstruating woman is not required to leave the camp, as she is in many savage communities.

From the moment of the ceremony¹ just described the girl enters a new condition which is denoted in the *Aka-Jeru* language by the word *aka-op* (*aka-yaba* in *Aka-Bea*). This word means that the person to whom it is applied is under certain ritual restrictions, chiefly concerned with foods that may not be eaten.

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In the case of a boy there is no physiological event so clearly marked as there is in that of a girl. It rests with the relatives and friends to decide when the boy is to become *aka-op*. It would seem that in the Southern tribes there is no ceremony on this occasion. Among the Northern tribes the boy is made *aka-op* by means of a ceremony that consists of making the scars on his back that are customary in these tribes¹.

When the friends and relatives of a boy decide that he is old enough to have the incisions made in his back a dance is held in the evening, and the boy is required to dance through the

¹ Unfortunately I was not able to see this ceremony performed, and my information is therefore derived from the statements of the natives.

† [See pp. 92-94, cat. 116 — Analyst.]

now follow them, often ignoring their original significance and symbolism. Among the Onge, spirits are feared but not loved; the same applies to God Himself. 775

The Onge bury their dead in trenches, no deeper than three feet. Earth is tightly packed over the graves in order to prevent exhalations. Full details on the subject of Onge burial customs appear in the book that I am writing about the Onge. I slept with the Onge in communal huts that contained fresh graves, without suffering any inconvenience from the smell of the corpses. This recalls the palaeolithic sepulchral caves, where man probably lived as the Onge live in their sepulchral huts today. 764

There are no latrines near Onge camps - whether permanent or temporary. Excrements are spread carelessly all around, lightly covered with leaves and earth. Flies lay eggs on them. The Onge's only precaution is not to defecate where drinking water might be found after rainfall. With so many opportunities for reproduction, in some places flies form such clouds as to impress the natives themselves. In the north of Little Andaman a creek was named after the flies: Bumila Creek, which means "fly creek". Smells also occasionally inspire geographical names: Tambe-é-bûie, on the north-east coast of Little Andaman, means "the smelly place" in the Onge language. Flies, fleas and ticks are tolerated by the Onge who do not fight them. Fortunately, the hymenoptera collect flies for their nests, not, however, in quantities large enough to compete with the fertility of the species. 514 [312] 796 825 [103]

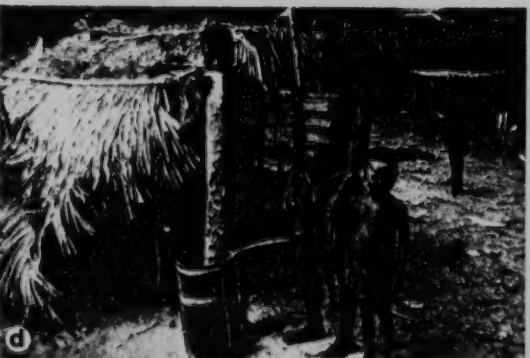
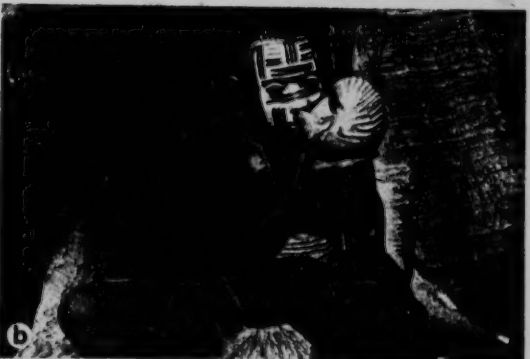
2. Clothing and personal care

The only garment worn by Little Andaman women is the *naquinêghê*, a scanty grasslike apron covering the genitals. In addition, during menstrual periods, Onge women wear the *bataghê*, for hygienic purposes. This is a simple cluster of long, soft green leaves cut by the husband for his wife from special trees: *Myristica longifolia* and others. The only leaves used are those from the end of a stalk, a section of which is left attached to the leaves. The stalk is slipped under the *naquinêghê*, while the long leaves are passed between the thighs to be fastened at the back above the buttocks. It is curious to see Onge women in such myristical attire! The *bataghê* is ethnographical news, new not only as regards the Andamans: it is an interesting indication of the hygienic measures employed by primitive people, and can probably be traced to prehistoric practices in analogous circumstances. The continental and insular regions nearest to the Andamans have retained no similar custom; their only practice is the strict isolation of menstruating women. Among the Onge, on the other hand, they are allowed free circulation. Washing is unknown to the Onge: they never wash their bodies intentionally. Brushing through the thick forest and diving into the sea or the river to collect food substitute adequately for washing. The Little Andaman forest is nearly always dripping; moving among the trees, specially in the early morning, is equivalent to bathing. The contact of wet leaves when walking cleans the Onge's skin, for they go naked; and as they constantly dive into the sea and rivers, they do not smell. Actually they give an impression of cleanliness - as opposed to many other dark-skinned 291 841 [824] [71] 515 [47]

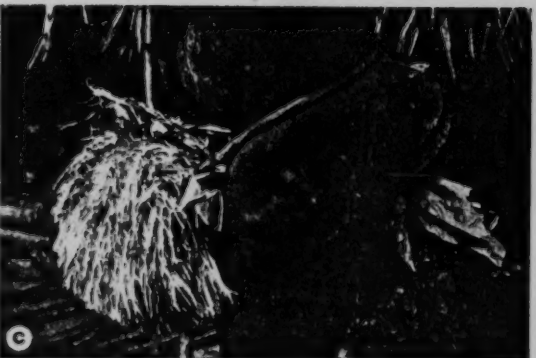
Idio Cipriani, Hygiene and Medical Practices among the
Onge (Little Andaman)

Plate 1

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- a) Onge communal hut.
- b) Painted Onge woman drinking from a nautilus shell.
- c) Woman with *balaghi* leaves.
- d) Filter going from mouth to mouth.

common in the Andamans, said by RADCLIFFE-BROWN (p. 273) to be eaten by the Andaman Islanders as a protection against rheumatism, is never killed. For some superstitious reason the Onge are simply horrified at the thought of touching such an enormous flying bat. Among the fruits, those of a plant whose wood has such a revolting smell that it is known, in English, as "stool-tree", are believed to have exceptional protective properties for the human body. The fruits themselves smell even worse than the wood, but this, to the Onge, makes them appetizing rather than disgusting. Concerning honey, and the many sugary fruits of the jungle that are available all the year round, the Onge luckily ignore the simple method of distilling alcohol. No intoxicating drink reaches Little Andaman from the outer world, whereas in Great Andaman alcohol, together with imported syphilis, was one of the main causes of depopulation. No syphilis appears as yet to have reached Little Andaman. This is also confirmed by the research carried out by Dr. HERMANN LEHMANN of London's St. Bartholomew's Hospital, during February 1953 in my Onge camp in Labanare (north-east coast of Little Andaman).

II. Effects on the People's Lives

The islanders die young, specially the men. The majority of them succumb before reaching the age of 20; most of the survivors die between 20 and 40; the rest - with a very few exceptions - before 50. Women, after marriage, follow a similar pattern: the death rate among women, however, is slightly different owing to a less corrosive sexual life. Some women may live to the age of sixty, but both sexes age soon, appearing older than their years when still in their twenties. The short Onge span of life recalls conditions which apparently prevailed among prehistoric and protohistoric men. Palaeolithic man died at an earlier age than modern man. The Onge today, in many respects, behaves as palaeolithic man behaved countless centuries ago. - Infant mortality is high; the first five days of life are the most critical for the Onge, owing, in part, to the hard life led by mothers even during pregnancy, which often causes functional damage to the placenta. Delivery is generally easy and traumatic injury rarely occurs; but premature births are common, and so are malformations and other anomalies. Imperfect infants are quickly eliminated by their parents. As a result, only a small number of children are allowed to grow up, but these appear normal. There are no blind and no deaf-and-dumb people in Little Andaman. I saw only two instances of incipient lameness: in an unharmed boy of about twenty and in a young married woman. Only robust infants can survive.

The Onge, so careful about their food, are completely indifferent to something else that is considered very harmful in continental and insular regions close to the Andamans. There, menstruating women are often segregated and considered harmful to the entire community. Not so in Little Andaman, where the remedies applied in the circumstance are extremely primitive (cf. supra) and could probably be traced to palaeolithic man. I saw nothing

- 841 resembling these practices in any other part of the world. Never hitherto
171 described, they should be carefully considered. This would require a lengthy
description, for which there is no space here. We may recall that menstruating
Onge women are allowed to circulate freely at all times. An interesting detail
[751] is that the *naquinēghē* of first menstruations are worn by relations around their
neck as having health-giving properties. The women, as we know, use special
841 soft, long leaves, collected for them by their husbands, as absorbents. They
[824] are the leaves of *Myristica longifolia* or of *Tretanthera lanceifolia* both species
serving the purpose. They are applied under the *naquinēghē* and drawn back
between the legs to be secured above the buttocks. - Sexual intercourse is
[834] forbidden during the menstrual period even by the Onge: illness - a swelling
[753] of the arms or legs - would follow. A curious theory about the reason for
menstruation in very young girls is that it is a result of previous sexual contacts
stimulated by nose rubbing - the Onge substitute for kissing. They ignore the
892 unhygienic practice of kissing with the lips, and never even kiss their children.
Only nose rubbing is practiced. The anatomical structure of the Onge nose,
which almost totally lacks nasal bones and is very fleshy, may explain this
transference of sensation from nearby regions, i. e. the lips.

- 844 Births take place in the forest and are surrounded by no hygienic pre-
cautions or disinfection as conceived by us. Clay is applied to stem puerperal
bleeding, without provoking infection. The only assistant is the pregnant
woman's husband, and sometimes one or two old women. Their ability equals
that of a herdsman delivering his goat of a kid. No inconvenience arises, in
either instance, from lack of precautions. - The tiny, tender and graceful bodies
[751] of Onge infants are smeared with ochre and light-coloured clay for hygienic
purposes. This is done immediately after birth, and affords some protection
against the teeming legions of mosquitos and ticks that plague Little Andaman.
The infant is never washed in water, not even at the very moment of birth.
The placenta is buried 30 or 40 cms deep, under the bed of naked branches
upon which the mother delivered her baby.

- 842 An argument that deserves much attention concerns the possible link
143 between lack of hygiene and sterility among the Onge. A vast number of married
couples have no offspring, thereby threatening their group with extinction.
Consanguinity could be given as a cause: let us examine it. No doubt the Onge
are related to each other as a consequence of long interbreeding in their island
with no foreigners admitted. These conditions afford an ideal field for studying
the effects of endogamy on man. Nowhere in the world, as far as I know, are a
people so isolated as in Little Andaman. Inbreeding has existed at 100 % ever
since remote times. In other words, the Onge would seem to be the most highly
inbred human population known up to the present. Could this fact alone, aside
from unhealthy habits, explain their present widespread sterility? Special
174 studies on the subject should be undertaken, keeping in mind that the Onge
have certainly inhabited Little Andaman for thousands of years, on the evi-
dence of my excavations in their kitchen-middens.